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Humour, neutrality, and preparedness: American satirical magazines and the First World War, 1914–1917

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journals.sagepub.com/home/wih**Vincent Trott** 

The Open University, UK

Abstract

This article discusses how American satirical magazines responded to the First World War while the United States remained a neutral power. By focusing on these previously overlooked sources, it demonstrates that satirical humour performed two significant functions. First, it acted as a tool of persuasion through which magazines agitated for or against American intervention in the conflict. Second, it became a major means with which periodicals sought to ostracize German-Americans, fuelling nativist sentiment. Ultimately, satirical magazines suggest that while responses to the war were initially diverse, most Americans had come to support military intervention by April 1917.

Keywords

First World War, United States, humour, magazines, neutrality, preparedness

On 10 February 1916, the front cover of the popular American satirical magazine *Life* was adorned with an eye-catching map of North America (Image 1). The map depicts an imaginary near-future scenario in which the United States is no more. Rather, the bulk of the country is controlled by Germany and is named ‘New Prussia’. The West Coast has been ceded to Japan and is named ‘Japonica’, while Florida, now known as ‘Turconia’, has fallen into the hands of the Ottoman Empire, Germany’s ally during the war. This edition of the magazine, described on its front cover as the ‘Get Ready Number’, was one of many American voices calling for increased military preparedness during the First World War. While the United States remained an officially neutral nation at this stage of the conflict, many Americans began to fear that an unchecked

Corresponding author:

Vincent Trott, Department of History, The Open University, 127 Wilson A Block, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK.

Email: vincent.trott@open.ac.uk



What was *Life* satirizing here, and what were its readers supposed to be laughing at? By using humour, the magazine may have been mocking overblown fears of invasion, and perhaps even undermining the arguments of those who advocated preparedness.

However, when this image is read alongside the magazine's editorials – which consistently pressed for preparedness – it becomes clear that *Life* was also making a serious point. *Life*'s editors, alongside a growing number of other Americans, believed that the United States needed to be able to defend itself against foreign threats. An invasion may have been unlikely, but it was not entirely implausible. If Germany defeated Britain on the Western Front, there was a risk that Canada, a British Dominion, might fall into German hands, which in turn would severely threaten American security.¹

Life's arresting cover image reflects how widely the Great War pervaded American culture, even before US intervention in April 1917. From the moment it broke out in Europe in the summer of 1914, the war provoked discussion and debate in American publications, and the nation's citizens became acutely aware of developments on the other side of the Atlantic.² Despite this, there have been relatively few works which deal in depth with how the war affected the United States between 1914 and 1917. As the historian Jennifer Keene has recently argued, 'too often, discussions of America's road to war become focused nearly exclusively on Woodrow Wilson's decision making'.³ The social and cultural dimensions of the neutrality period – and especially the responses of the American public during these years – remain under-explored, and there is no historical consensus regarding the extent to which the American people supported intervention before April 1917. Historians have typically downplayed popular support for the war, though more recent works have begun to revise these assumptions.⁴ David Monod's

1 Michael S. Neiberg, *The Path to War: How the First World War Created Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 103.

2 Hazel Hutchison, *The War That Used Up Words: American Writers and the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 119.

3 Chris Capozzola, Andrew Huebner, Julia Irwin, Jennifer D. Keene, Ross Kennedy, Michael Neiberg, Stephen R. Ortiz, Chad Williams and Jay Winter, 'Interchange: World War I', *The Journal of American History*, 102:2 (2015), p. 466. Historians have recently started to focus on the broader dimensions of the neutrality period. For instance, see Neiberg, *The Path to War*; Michael Kazin, *War Against War: The American Fight for Peace, 1914–1918* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018); and Zachary Smith, *Age of Fear: Othering and American Identity During World War I* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019). For a discussion of American literary culture during the First World War, both before and after the neutrality period, see Hutchison, *That War That Used Up Words*; and Jonathan Vincent, *The Health of the State: Modern US War Narrative and the American Political Imagination, 1890–1964* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 49–85.

4 While acknowledging support for intervention amongst the nation's elites, many scholars have suggested that the President and Congress led the nation into war against the wishes of the general populace. For instance, see Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality, 1914–1915* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 18; Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 108; Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), p. 339; David M. Lubin, *Flags and Faces: The Visual Culture of America's First World War* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), p. 3; and Kazin, *War Against War*, p. 184. Michael Neiberg, however, has challenged these assumptions, arguing that most Americans supported the President's decision for war in 1917. See Neiberg, *The Path to War*, p. 235.

examination of popular song during the neutrality period, for instance, suggests that militaristic sentiment was commonplace in American society between 1914 and 1917.⁵ As *Life's* map demonstrates, an examination of the humour industry, and especially the satirical press, also points to the prevalence of pro-war sentiment.

Humour, however, has often been ignored by scholars of the First World War.⁶ While European humour magazines and a range of trench newspapers have attracted attention, the American satirical press has been almost completely neglected in this context.⁷ And yet, as *Life's* map illustrates, humour became an influential and persuasive mode through which Americans responded to the war. Satirical humour could be found in a range of forms, from novels to popular songs, but periodicals were perhaps the most potent political medium within the humour industry. Their regular publication enabled them to react swiftly to events, while their combination of written and visual material allowed them to inform, entertain, and persuade.

Humour was a feature of daily newspapers, many of which printed cartoons and comic strips.⁸ General interest magazines, likewise, often contained humorous short stories, and some had humour sections which printed jokes and cartoons.⁹ This article, however, primarily addresses dedicated humour magazines – those which focused predominantly (though by no means exclusively) on humorous content. These humorous magazines have been almost completely overlooked.¹⁰ Within their pages, humour took

5 David Monod, 'I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier': Popular Song and American Neutrality, 1914–1917', *War in History* 24:4 (2017), p. 457.

6 Notable exceptions include Pierre Purseigle, 'Mirroring Societies at War: Pictorial Humour in the British and French Press during the First World War', *Journal of European Studies*, 31:123 (2001), pp. 289–328; and Clémentine Tholas-Disset and Karen A. Ritzenhoff, eds, *Humor, Entertainment and Popular Culture during World War I* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

7 For a discussion of European satirical magazines, see Lesley Milne, *Laughter and War: Humorous-Satirical Magazines in Britain, France, Germany and Russia 1914–1918* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016). For a discussion of humour in Anglophone trench journals, see Graham Seal, *The Soldiers' Press: Trench Journals in the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 14.

8 Most major newspapers employed editorial cartoonists. *The Brooklyn Eagle's* Nelson Harding, for example, regularly responded to the war in his cartoons. *The New York American's* comic strip 'Mutt and Jeff' also addressed the conflict.

9 *The Saturday Evening Post*, one of the nation's most popular magazines, published numerous short stories, some of which were humorous. For a discussion of the magazine's output during the war, see Ann-Marie Einhaus, 'First World War Short Fiction' in *The Edinburgh Companion to the First World War and the Arts*, eds. Ann-Marie Einhaus and Katherine Isobel Baxter (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 50–5. Major magazines, such as *Harper's* and *The Century*, for example, had dedicated humour sections. See Michael H. Epp, 'The Humor Industry' in Christine Bold, ed., *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture: Volume Six: US Popular Print Culture 1860–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 363.

10 Studies of the American press during the First World War have focused primarily on the newspaper industry. For instance, see Kevin J. O'Keefe, *A Thousand Deadlines: The New York City Press and American Neutrality, 1914–1917* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972);

a variety of forms, ranging from one-line jokes and poems through to satirical articles and witty observations. In the larger satirical periodicals – which had higher production budgets – visual humour and cartoon satire were of great significance. Whereas editorials supplied the serious political commentary, cartoons often distilled this message into an entertaining and persuasive form.

This article, therefore, examines how a sample of five American humour magazines responded to the war between August 1914 and April 1917. It focuses chiefly on the three largest weekly humour publications during this period, all of which were published in New York City: *Life*, which had a circulation of 161,000 at the beginning of 1914; *Judge*, which had a circulation of 110,000; and *Puck*, which had a circulation of 70,000.¹¹ These national publications dominated the market for humour magazines and had few other direct competitors.¹² They were not, however, the only satirical magazines published in the United States during this period. David Sloane's bibliography of American humour periodicals lists 18 such publications that were in operation during the First World War, though most of these were far smaller than *Life*, *Judge*, and *Puck*.¹³ This article also focuses on two monthly publications of this nature, both of which help to reflect the range of satirical responses to the war. The first of these, *Jim Jam Jems*, was a North Dakotan periodical sympathetic to Germany and one example of a small number of dedicated humour magazines which catered to a local readership.¹⁴ Although far smaller than the national magazines, it provides a revealing counterpoint to the larger periodicals. The second, *The Masses*, was a socialist publication which consistently opposed the war.¹⁵ The magazine is usually classified as a political rather than humorous magazine and is not listed in Sloane's bibliography. Nevertheless, the editor of the *Masses*, Max Eastman, placed a strong emphasis on humour, and satirical content frequently features within its pages.¹⁶ Its distinct ideological agenda also helps to illustrate the varied functions of magazine humour during the First World War.

and Phillips Payson O'Brien, 'The American Press, Public, and the Reaction to the Outbreak of the First World War', *Diplomatic History* 37:3 (2013), pp. 446–73.

- 11 *N. W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer and Son, 1914), p. 1174.
- 12 These three magazines are the only dedicated humour periodicals listed in *N. W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory* between 1914 and 1917. This suggests that there were no other satirical magazines with a comparable nationwide circulation.
- 13 David E. E. Sloane, ed., *American Humor Magazines and Comic Periodicals* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).
- 14 Reliable circulation figures for *Jim Jam Jems* are unavailable. Other local humour publications listed in Sloane's bibliography include the *Laramie Boomerang*, published in Laramie, Wyoming; the *Arkansaw Thomas Cat*, published in Hot Springs, Arkansas; and the *Argus*, based in Seattle, Washington.
- 15 *The Masses* is likely to have had a circulation of around 12,000 during the First World War. See William L. O'Neil, ed., *Echoes of Revolt: The Masses, 1911–1917* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1989), p. 18.
- 16 The first page of each issue described *The Masses* as 'a Magazine with a Sense of Humor'. For instance, see *The Masses*, September 1914, p. 3.

By examining these previously overlooked sources, this article demonstrates how American attitudes to the war evolved during this period. As commercial enterprises, periodicals aimed to reflect their readers' views: in the popular magazines, as John Tebbel and Mary Zuckerman have observed, 'could be found the opinions, attitudes, emotions, preoccupations, and interests of most Americans'.¹⁷ This was especially the case with humorous content. As Pierre Purseigle has argued in a study of British and French wartime cartoons, 'the correct understanding of a joke requires both the cartoonist and reader to share a set of values and representations'.¹⁸ If not, attempts at humour fail. In analysing humour, however, this article will not only recover the manifold perspectives of different Americans. It will also reveal how editors, writers, and cartoonists sought to *condition* public responses to the war.

Humour performed a variety of functions and is especially revealing in this respect. Philosophers ranging from Plato to Henri Bergson have stressed that laughter is a form of ridicule directed at perceived inferiority.¹⁹ It therefore acts as a social corrective: through ridicule, people use humour to denigrate certain forms of behaviour and to persuade others to act in a particular way.²⁰ It is here that humour and satire overlap. Although the latter does not have to provoke laughter, it tends to be humorous. Indeed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines satire as a 'type of derisive humour or irony' typified by 'sarcasm' or 'mocking wit', and often directed 'against something perceived as foolish or immoral'.²¹ Other theories, which owe much to Sigmund Freud, stress humour's function as a 'safety-valve' which permits the expression of repressed fear, tensions, and anxiety.²² This function of humour complements its capacity for ridicule. Humour is often directed towards those seen as threatening, in a process of 'othering' which ostracizes communities seen as different or inimical to the dominant group identity. In this sense, as the historian Martina Kessel has argued, humour is 'a device to negotiate belonging and to mark boundaries'.²³

These functions are central to understanding the significance of humour in the United States during the First World War. Through its ability to mock, ridicule, and persuade, satirical humour became a major tool of political agitation, through which American editors, writers, and cartoonists sought to pressurize politicians and to convince their readers. This in turn could influence political decision-making. President Woodrow Wilson

17 John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America, 1741–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 73.

18 Purseigle, 'Mirroring societies at war', p. 308.

19 John Morreall, ed., *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 5, 117.

20 Jane Chapman, Anna Hoyles, Andrew Kerr and Adam Sherif, *Comics and the World Wars: A Cultural Record* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 81.

21 'Satire, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Available at: <https://www-oed-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/Entry/171207?result=1&rskey=v9Geg6&> (June 2020).

22 Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, p. 111.

23 Martina Kessel, 'Introduction' in Martina Kessel and Patrick Merzinger, eds, *The Politics of Humour: Laughter, Inclusion and Exclusion in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 9.

himself observed in August 1914 that ‘the spirit of the Nation will be determined largely by what individuals and society and those gathered in public meetings do and say, upon what magazines and newspapers contain, upon what ministers utter in their pulpits’.²⁴ As Michael H. Epp has argued, political satire and especially illustrated cartoon humour had a major political influence during this period.²⁵ Satirical magazines, therefore, alongside other print media, both reflected *and* helped to shape public responses to the conflict.

Humour also became a major tool with which publications sought to delimit notions of American identity during the First World War. Through ridiculing and ostracizing communities deemed threatening to American values – most notably German-Americans – many satirical magazines, as we shall see, helped to construct an ideal of American identity centred on Anglo-Saxon heritage. This othering of Germans during the First World War, as Zachary Smith has demonstrated, was fuelled by white Anglo-Saxon Americans’ ‘apprehension over the security and stability of their national and ethnic identity’.²⁶ Although Smith does not explicitly acknowledge its importance, this article argues that humour was integral to this process. It charts the responses of satirical magazines to the events of the war chronologically, demonstrating how debates over preparedness, neutrality, and American identity played out within their pages. In doing so, it demonstrates that, while responses to the First World War were *initially* diverse, most satirical magazines came to support military preparedness, nativism, and ultimately, military intervention.

I. Early responses to the war

Upon the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, the press tended to agree with Wilson’s policy of neutrality, though they were far more likely to support the allies than the Central Powers: in November 1914, a survey of over 350 newspapers noted that 49 per cent of editors expressed no allegiance, with 46 per cent favouring the allies.²⁷ Support for the allies was particularly common among the nation’s East Coast elite, including many of those who controlled the publishing industry, not least because most were of Anglo-Saxon heritage and had strong ties to Britain.²⁸ Many of the country’s most influential newspapers in New York City, for instance, were sympathetic to the allies, though they did not at this stage call for intervention.²⁹

Similar biases existed within the magazine industry and especially at *Life* magazine, which had been established in 1882 by the Harvard graduates John Ames Mitchell,

24 Woodrow Wilson, *Essential Writings and Speeches of the Scholar-President*, ed. Mario R. DiNunzio (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 390.

25 Epp, ‘The Humor Industry’, p. 365.

26 Smith, *Age of Fear*, p. 2.

27 Justus D. Doenecke, *Nothing Less than War: A New History of America’s Entry into World War I* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), p. 20.

28 Lubin, *Flags and Faces*, p. 3. The publisher Ferris Greenslet, editor-in-chief at Houghton Mifflin, for example, was a staunch supporter of the allies. See John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States – Volume 2: The Expansion of the Industry, 1865–1919* (London: R. R. Bowker, 1975), pp. 81–3.

29 O’Keefe, *A Thousand Deadlines*, pp. 28–32.

Edward S. Martin, and Andrew S. Miller.³⁰ Mitchell, the magazine's editor, was a Francophile who had studied art in France as a young man. Martin, his editorial writer, hailed from an upper-class, landowning family based in New York State, and shaped *Life's* conservative, non-partisan political outlook.³¹ He too would express pro-allied views that were typical among the nation's Anglo-Saxon elites. The nation's largest satirical periodical during the First World War, *Life* catered primarily to an urban, East Coast readership that was white, male, and middle class.³²

Martin revealed the publication's sympathies during the war's opening weeks. On 3 September 1914, he wrote that

we do not intend to meddle in their scrap . . . But . . . all of us but a little band of German-born defenders of Germany seem to feel that it is for the interest of civilization that Germany should be beaten in this war.³³

Life's tone remained measured at this stage. Its editorials denounced the Kaiser and Prussian militarism – which Martin deemed responsible for the war – rather than the German people at large. To be sure, Martin's criticism of Germany did not result from a deep-seated animosity towards Germany or its people. He had written favourably of German-Americans in the past and had expressed sympathy for Germany in the build-up to the war.³⁴ The German decision to invade Belgium and then France, however, appears to have changed his mind. Indeed, as Kevin O'Keefe has demonstrated in his study of the New York press during this period, editors – regardless of their pre-existing sympathies – often came to support the allied cause when confronted with evidence of German aggression.³⁵

Despite its support for the allies, however, *Life* also used humour to express an aloofness and sense of superiority, reflecting a belief that the United States was above the seemingly petty squabbles that had caused the major European nations to descend into war. On 24 September 1914, for example, the magazine imagined a world in which the state of New York had declared war on the state of New Jersey. Readers are told that

Jersey declared that New York first began to mobilize. New York declares that it was Jersey. The ambassador from New York said, 'It was all due to the commuter peril. Hordes of these barbarians sweep down on us every day. Unless something is done they will be the dominant race on this continent'.³⁶

Life portrayed the European war as a ludicrous internecine conflict, no different from an unthinkable war between American states. This sense of American exceptionalism – which

30 David E. E. Sloane, 'Life' in Sloane, ed., *American Humor Magazines*, p. 141.

31 John Flautz, *Life: The Gentle Satirist* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972), p. 84.

32 Martha Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841–1936* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), p. 3.

33 Edward S. Martin, *Life*, 3 September 1914, p. 390.

34 Flautz, *Life: The Gentle Satirist*, p. 108.

35 O'Keefe, *A Thousand Deadlines*, p. 195.

36 'Why Not?', *Life*, 24 September 1914, p. 564.

placed the United States above the archaic infighting of the old world – was commonplace in the American press during the war's early months.³⁷ At this stage, American identity was often constructed in opposition to a vague notion of European identity. A more targeted anti-German rhetoric had not yet emerged.

Puck displayed a similar sense of detachment and superiority upon the outbreak of the war. The third-largest humour magazine in the country in 1914, *Puck* typically supported the Democratic Party, and it too catered primarily to an educated, middle-class audience.³⁸ On 7 November 1914, it included a humorous article on the theme of royal marriage. 'When this war is over, what is going to happen to royal matrimony?', asked its author:

For years . . . the reigning families of Europe have been drawing into closer relationship. Kings are cousins, nephews, or great-uncles by marriage to other kings, princes or grand-dukes. Queens have had to learn six languages in order to talk with their own grandchildren . . . But when the war is over . . . where are princes to find suitable wives? . . . Even the desperate expedient of marrying for love is among the possibilities.³⁹

A republican suspicion of hereditary rule contributed to this sense of superiority and exceptionalism; so too, perhaps, did a belief in Europe's supposed cultural homogeneity. With the notable exception of France, of course, the major belligerents in the war were monarchies. The fact that seemingly petty squabbles were taking place among members of the same family evidently appeared rather absurd to *Puck*'s satirists (and no doubt to many of its readers).

Unlike *Life*, however, *Puck* accompanied these sentiments with an anti-war stance. On 4 October 1914, a cartoon denounced war with a simple mathematical equation which showed that a civilized man when given a gun would regress to a primitive state (Image 2). As the war progressed, propagandists would use similar imagery to symbolize the supposedly barbaric qualities of the German people.⁴⁰ At this stage, however, *Puck* did not pinpoint Germany alone as a threat to civilization, but rather warfare in general.⁴¹ In October 1914, therefore, an anti-war stance was compatible with notions of American exceptionalism, or what the historian Ross Wilson had described as 'judgmental neutrality'.⁴² *Puck* had been founded by the Austrian-born émigré Joseph Keppler and the German immigrant Adolph Schwarzmann in 1876; its editor in 1914,

37 Ross J. Wilson, *New York and the First World War: Shaping an American City* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 79.

38 Michael Alexander Kahn and Richard Samuel West, *What Fools These Mortals Be: The Story of Puck, America's First and Most Influential Magazine of Color Political Cartoons* (San Diego: IDW Publishing, 2014), pp. 13, 43.

39 'Royal Marriages', *Puck*, 7 November 1914, p. 11.

40 For instance, see the American propaganda poster which depicts Germany as a Gorilla beneath the caption 'Destroy this Mad Brute'. Available at <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010652057/> (accessed 17 March 2019).

41 Despite this, the magazine had previously defended American involvement in the Spanish-American War of 1898. See Kahn and West, *What Fools These Mortals Be*, p. 183.

42 Wilson, *New York and the First World War*, p. 79.

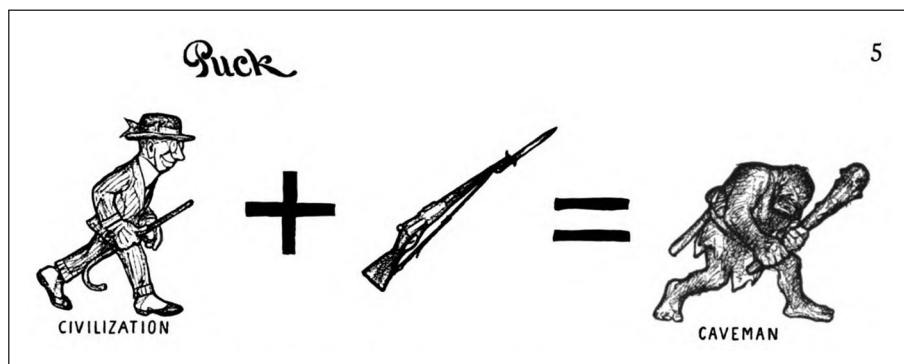


Image 2. *Puck*, 4 October 1914, p. 5.

Hy Mayer, was also of German extraction, as was the magazine's owner, Nathan Strauss Jr, who had purchased the publication earlier that year.⁴³ This is likely to have accounted for the magazine's refusal to back the allies. Like many German-Americans, even if Mayer and Strauss did not outwardly support the land of their ancestors, they may have found it difficult to express sympathy for the Allies. Pacifist sentiment, moreover, was by no means uncommon during the Progressive Era. A number of leading Progressive figures – such as the senator Robert la Follette and social reformer Jane Addams – held pacifist convictions during the conflict, helping to spearhead a diverse anti-war movement.⁴⁴

Puck was certainly not the only satirical magazine to profess pacifism at this stage. *Judge*, another major humour publication, expressed an anti-war perspective upon the outbreak of the conflict and refused to take sides. An editorial of 12 September stated that 'war means death, waste, butchery, desolation and all manner of suffering'. Rather than defending the allies as victims of German aggression, as *Life* had done, the editorial argued that 'it is difficult to justify any war on any theory'.⁴⁵ Edited by J. A. Waldron for most of the war, *Judge* was the second largest humour magazine in the country in 1914, specializing in gentle humour aimed at an urban, middle-class readership.⁴⁶ This too suggests that pacifist sentiment was far from uncommon during the early months of the war.

In combining a belief in neutrality with an outright denunciation of the war, *Judge's* position was not far from the perspective advanced by more radical publications. The monthly socialist magazine *The Masses*, founded in 1911, also unequivocally opposed the war, noting in November 1914 that 'of course we are against

43 Kahn and West, *What Fools These Mortals Be*, p. 15.

44 Dawley, *Changing the World*, p. 7. See Kazin, *War Against War*, for a detailed examination of the American anti-war movement between 1914 and 1918.

45 'Editorials', *Judge*, 12 September 1914.

46 Thomas Grant, 'Judge', in Sloane, ed., *American Humor Magazines*, pp. 111–9. I have been unable to find biographical information regarding Waldron. Although *Judge* had initially supported the Republican Party, its outlook was largely non-partisan by the time of the First World War. See Flautz, *Life*, p. 191.

it'.⁴⁷ Unlike *The Masses*, however, *Judge* did not have revolutionary motives. After all, *Judge* was a popular magazine catering to a mainstream audience, and despite this serious tone – which was common in its editorial pages – the magazine took a more light-hearted approach to the war elsewhere, as this piece of doggerel from the same issue illustrates:

My neighbor is a British born/a man of splendid qualities/And it is plain he holds in scorn/A lot of my frivolities/But now a smile I bring from him/By shouting loud God Save the King!

Across the way a German lives/A kind and very helpful neighbor/A peaceful man who daily gives/His home the profits of his labor/To keep his friendship firm I try, sir!/'Wie gehts' I cry, and 'Hoch der Kaiser!'. . .

I've praised 'em all – the Russ, the Jap/The gallant Scot from Tobermory/They shan't embroil me in their scrap/I wish 'em all success and glory/Within a neutral zone I'm sitting/Attending strictly to my knitting.⁴⁸

This poem is perhaps best read as an irreverent discussion of neutrality and its implications in a multi-ethnic society. However, unlike in later representations, the reader is not invited to laugh at the immigrant other in this verse. If anything, the narrator's enthusiastic attempts to appease all his neighbours simultaneously is the source of humour here.

While many of the most prominent East Coast publications maintained a neutral position or professed support for the allies, not all periodicals shared these views. The monthly Midwestern magazine *Jim Jam Jems* advocated a pro-German, anti-British stance. In October 1914, its editor Sam H. Clark suggested that British jealousy and anxiety regarding Germany's increasing economic strength was the root cause of the conflict. Clark argued that 'to cripple Germany's wonderful commerce is England's sole purpose in the present struggle', before criticizing the majority of American publications for their pro-allied sympathies. The press, claimed Clark, 'is not telling the truth . . . there seems to be a wilful desire and studied move . . . to present only the British side of the crisis and to harm Germany's cause as much as possible'.⁴⁹ Although pro-German perspectives were sometimes printed in American newspapers and magazines, it was unusual for a periodical to adopt this editorial position. It is important to note, however, that *Jim Jam Jems* was a small North Dakotan magazine, far removed from the sentiments of the nation's East Coast. The magazine is likely to have catered to a local readership, which may have influenced Clark's response to the war.⁵⁰ Founded in 1912, *Jim Jam Jems* was based in the state capital of Bismarck, a city the North Pacific Railroad had named after the former German Chancellor in 1873 in order to attract German immigrants to the area. North Dakota therefore had a large German-American population; according to the 1910

47 Arthur Bullard, 'To American Socialists', *The Masses*, November 1914, p. 6.

48 Edgar A. Guest, 'Neutrality', *Judge*, 12 September 1914.

49 Sam H. Clark, "'Made in Germany": Real Cause of War', *Jim Jam Jems*, October 1914, pp. 53–4.

50 Regrettably, as with many magazines from this period, detailed demographic information about the publication's readership is hard to obtain.

census, German-born immigrants accounted for 18 per cent of the state's population. Many others had German-born parents.⁵¹ It is unclear whether Clark had any German roots himself, but he certainly had German-American readers. One of Clark's sympathetic portrayals of the German people, for example, was seized upon in 1916 and reprinted in the *Fatherland*, a pro-German magazine edited by the German-American George Viereck and funded, for propaganda purposes, by the German government.⁵²

Jim Jam Jems also ridiculed the British. In February 1915, Clark wrote an article from the perspective of a warmongering Briton entitled 'Johnny Bull is Bellowing'. In a parody of a London accent, Clark's cockney caricature highlighted the supposed jingoism and aggression of Britain:

I say old top, yer 'itting below the belt. Hi was just fooling when Hi established a blockade of the North Sea; thought you'd take it as a joke, doncherknow; 'ere Hi 'ave been busy building a bloomin' big navy all these years and hexpected to sail 'round on my blarsted bottoms on top of the watah and kill off all presuming contenders for trade, doncherknow . . .⁵³

This article was a response to the imposition of the British naval blockade in the North Sea, which severely limited Germany's ability to trade with the rest of the world. In retaliation, Germany began to use submarines to torpedo British ships, an act which Clark defended later in the article, when he abandoned the John Bull caricature, and stressed that Germany's response was justified. He argued that 'we can't for the life of us see anything unfair in Germany's declaration to Torpedo every ship which carries supplies into the warzone for the enemy'.⁵⁴ This defence of German strategy is a far cry from the position adopted by magazines such as *Life*, which firmly denounced German submarine warfare. In the final part of the article, Clark attacked mainstream publications again, arguing that their outrage was in fact driven by money-making concerns rather than morals.⁵⁵ This may well have been the case: the United States benefitted greatly from the British demand for its exports, and those who profited did not want to see trade disrupted. Clark was also likely to have been catering to the sentiments of his midwestern readership. Anti-British sentiment was more common in the farming communities of the Midwest, as was a general suspicion of Wall Street and East Coast financial elites.⁵⁶

51 Timothy G. Anderson, 'Germans' in David J. Wishart, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p. 233. Around 8 million of the nation's 92 million residents had been born in Germany or had a German parent: see Doenecke, *Nothing Less than War*, pp. 15–7.

52 'How "Shirt-Sleeve Diplomacy" Treats Americans Abroad', *The Fatherland*, 2 May 1916, p. 201. For a discussion of the German government's funding of the *Fatherland*, see Chad R. Fulwider, *German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2016), p. 68.

53 Sam H. Clark, 'Johnny Bull is Bellowing', *Jim Jam Jems*, February 1915, p. 11.

54 Clark, 'Johnny Bull is Bellowing', p. 13.

55 Clark, 'Johnny Bull is Bellowing', pp. 15–6.

56 Page Smith, *America Enters the World: A People's History of the Progressive Era and World War I* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1985), p. 44.

During the first few months of the war, then, satirical magazines deployed humour for a range of reasons: to express American exceptionalism; to denounce war altogether; and, in some cases, to mock or express sympathy for one of the belligerent nations. But they rarely used it, at this stage, to force Wilson's hand regarding the war. This would begin to change after May 1915, as satirists began to harness humour's persuasive potential when responding to the conflict.

II. Preparedness

On 7 May 1915, a German U-boat sank the *Lusitania*, a prestigious luxury liner carrying passengers from New York to Liverpool; 1200 passengers were killed, including 128 American citizens. Despite German claims that the ship was carrying war contraband, many Americans were outraged that a submarine had targeted a passenger ship. The incident also brought the war closer to home: it became apparent that Americans were not necessarily out of harm's way, despite their distance from the battlefields.⁵⁷ Wilson, however, stuck rigidly to his policy of neutrality, claiming that Americans were 'too proud to fight'. Instead, he hoped to seek assurances from the German government that it would abandon its aggressive U-boat campaign. In doing so, he angered those who favoured a more bellicose response. Theodore Roosevelt, for instance, lambasted Wilson for his refusal to adopt an aggressive stance, though he stopped short of explicitly proposing intervention.⁵⁸ Edward S. Martin shared these sentiments. In the 20 May 1915 edition of *Life*, he argued that 'there is no sign yet that with Germany anything but force, applied or prospective, will have the least effect'.⁵⁹

Not all satirical periodicals turned against Germany, however. In *Jim Jam Jems*, Clark argued that, while tragic, German actions were justified because the ship was British and contained contraband goods.⁶⁰ This may have been true, but few publications had the audacity to defend German actions after the loss of innocent American lives. Those which did tended to cater to distinct readerships with little sympathy for the British. Unsurprisingly, German-American newspapers downplayed German aggression and criticized the British for placing civilians at risk by carrying contraband.⁶¹ Some black newspapers, meanwhile, argued that German actions were not necessarily any worse than those undertaken by Britain in its African colonies.⁶² Clark's small, midwestern readership is also unlikely to have had any connections to the *Lusitania* or any great sympathy for the British. This gave him the freedom to deviate from the sentiments expressed in the national magazines.

Clark's position certainly contrasts sharply with *Life*'s output throughout 1915 and 1916. In the wake of the *Lusitania* incident, many Americans called for 'preparedness',

57 Neiberg, *The Path to War*, pp. 67–8.

58 Neiberg, *The Path to War*, pp. 74–5.

59 Edward S. Martin, *Life*, 20 May 1915, p.902.

60 Sam H. Clark, 'Jingoes and Hotheads', *Jim Jam Jems*, June 1915, pp. 11–2.

61 Wilson, *New York and the First World War*, p. 101.

62 William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America's War for Democracy, 1914–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 41.

'Continental Army' of citizen soldiers, though these measures fell far short of what many pro-preparedness voices demanded.⁶⁴ Arguments for a more substantive commitment to preparedness, therefore, continued in *Life*, and elsewhere, throughout much of 1915 and 1916, especially after opposition in Congress forced Wilson to abandon his support for a Continental Army.⁶⁵ The front cover illustration for the 13 May 1916 issue of *Puck*, for instance, emphasized the nation's apparent vulnerability. Drawn by the artist James Montgomery Flagg, who also regularly drew for *Judge*, the image depicted a female statue symbolizing the United States. Naked from the waist up, shorn of its arms, and draped only in the American flag, the image was accompanied by the caption 'Defenseless'.⁶⁶ *Puck*'s shift from pacifism to preparedness illustrates how popular attitudes to the war had evolved in the wake of the *Lusitania* incident. Unlike *Life*, which had sought to shape public sentiment regarding preparedness, *Puck*'s editors appear to have been more reactive, seeking to reflect shifts in public opinion on the matter.⁶⁷ As John Finnegan asserts, 'preparedness had become a popular fad or a craze' by this stage in the war, which certainly made *Puck*'s new stance a commercially viable approach.⁶⁸ The magazine's circulation had declined from 70,000 at the beginning of 1914 to only 20,000 by 1915.⁶⁹ Reflecting the popular mood was one way of increasing sales, and since the *Lusitania* incident the magazine had certainly adopted a less sympathetic stance towards Germany.⁷⁰ *Puck*'s circulation did indeed recover to some extent, averaging 50,000 by the end of 1916.⁷¹

Criticisms of neutrality accompanied arguments for preparedness after the *Lusitania* incident. The waterfall metaphor – which implied a gradual journey towards inevitable disaster – was employed again by *Life* in June 1915 to question Wilson's commitment to neutrality (Image 4). The message in this cartoon, drawn by William H. Walker, was clear: by refusing to adopt a more bellicose stance, Wilson was actually increasing the chances of war. Although *Judge* took a less vehement stance than *Life*, it too had begun

64 John Patrick Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon: The Campaign for American Military Preparedness, 1914–1917* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1974), pp. 79, 84.

65 After considerable debate, Congress passed the National Defense Act in June 1916. Although this authorized the expansion of the National Guard and the Regular Army, it did not include plans for the formation of a Continental Army. See Neiberg, *The Path to War*, p. 159.

66 *Puck*, 13 May 1916, front cover. Flagg is now best known for creating the famous 'I Want You' recruiting poster, which he drew the following year.

67 *Puck*'s Literary Editor, A. H. Folwell, replaced Hy Mayer as the magazine's primary editor in 1915, though Mayer continued as Contributing Editor. In 1916, both were replaced by Karl Schmidt. Nathan Strauss Jr., however, continued to own the magazine throughout this period and is likely to have been the driving force behind the shift in *Puck*'s stance during the war.

68 Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon*, p. 3.

69 *N. W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer and Son, 1915), p. 1188. The exact reason for this sudden dip in circulation in 1914 is unclear, but it coincided with Nathan Strauss Jr.'s purchase of the magazine at the beginning of the year. This change in ownership may have caused *Puck* to lose many of its longstanding subscribers.

70 See, for example, *Puck*, 29 May 1915, p. 5.

71 *N. W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer and Son, 1917), p. 1192.

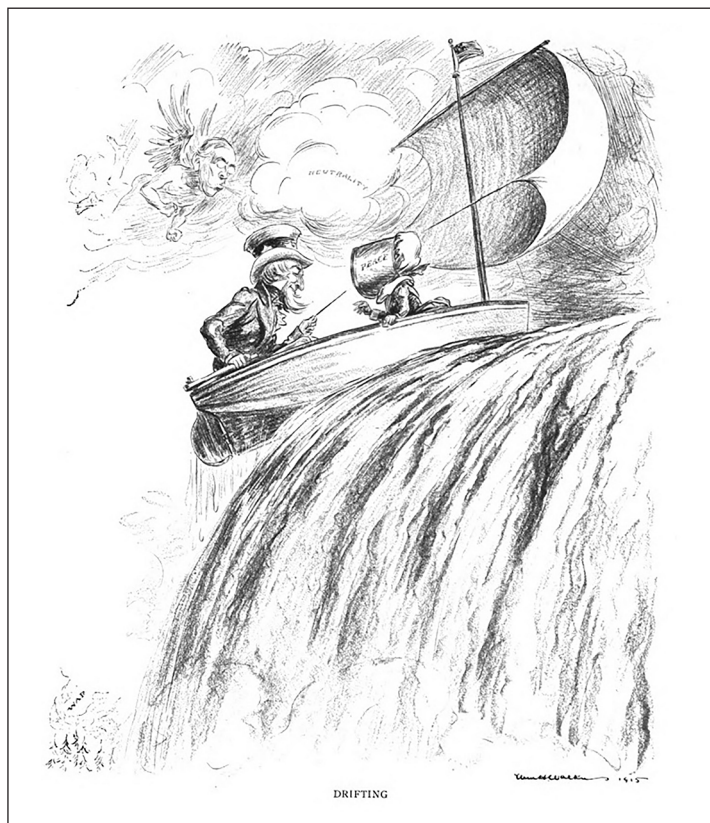


Image 4. William H. Walker, *Life*, 10 June 1915, p. 1055.

to question Wilson's adherence to neutrality, even before the *Lusitania* incident. In early May 1915, the magazine contained a short article entitled 'The Bat'. Its author, Maurice Switzer, observed that the bat

belongs to the mammals, is allied to birds and is something of a reptile. He is a sort of fusionist who could without prejudice or embarrassment stand for any platform that would stand for him. Once when the Birds and the Beasts were at war, the bat was always found with the victors . . . He eventually got what was coming to him when a dual alliance was formed: he was cut in two and divided between friends . . . The present status of the bat also shows the futility of being a little of everything and nothing much of anything. Don't be a bat.⁷²

There is no reference to the war in Europe, or American neutrality, in this article, but the bat, of course, is a metaphor for the United States. Many Americans began to feel that not picking a side might prove detrimental to US interests in the long-term, not least because the United States might be vulnerable to whichever side eventually won out.

⁷² Maurice Switzer, 'The Bat', *Judge*, 1 May 1915.

Not all satirical magazines advocated preparedness. Sam H. Clark maintained his anti-British stance, arguing in *Jim Jam Jems* that American perceptions were unfairly skewed in favour of the allies. In April 1916, after returning from a trip to Europe, during which he had travelled behind the German lines, Clark wrote a vehement editorial criticizing British censorship and the consequent spread of false information in the American press:

The American people have been misled, misinformed and deliberately lied to. Great Britain controls the seas; she controls the cables; she seizes our mails and censors letters, communications and all news . . . Thus, the great bulk of 'war news', as published in the American press is 'Made in Great Britain', and public sentiment in America has been built upon false, unfounded, unreliable 'dope'.⁷³

Though hyperbolic, Clark's editorial was not entirely inaccurate. Many American publishers sympathized with the allies, and newspapers were more likely to criticize the Central Powers than the allies. Britain did not, however, exert complete control over the flow of information across the Atlantic. Although the Royal Navy had indeed cut the transatlantic cable carrying news between the United States and Germany, reports could still be transmitted wirelessly between Berlin and New York.⁷⁴ The German government had also established a propaganda office in New York City, which arranged the publication of pro-German articles in the American press.⁷⁵ German propagandists could still attempt to shape American public opinion, even if they could not guarantee a receptive audience.

Most opponents of preparedness, however, refused to take sides. *The Masses*, which remained committed to internationalist, socialist principles, consistently opposed the war and advocated strict neutrality. Preparedness was anathema to its editor, Max Eastman, whose sister, Crystal Eastman, was also now a key figure in the American peace movement.⁷⁶ A cartoon from the September 1916 issue, drawn by the prolific cartoonist Boardman Robinson, humorously exposed the logical inconsistencies in the pro-preparedness argument (Image 5). Another cartoon, from the same issue, juxtaposed a quotation from an American admiral – who had claimed that military training would make the 'average American boy . . . better mannered' – with an image of a new recruit aggressively bayoneting a dummy (Image 6).⁷⁷ The contrast between these words and the violent reality of warfare alluded to in the illustration no doubt appealed to pacifist readers with a sense of humour. As with those cartoons which pressed for preparedness, humour's capacity to ridicule made images like these particularly potent vehicles for political agitation.

73 Sam H. Clark, 'Monthly Preamble', *Jim Jam Jems*, April 1916, p. 7.

74 Wilson, *New York and the First World War*, p. 71.

75 For a discussion of the German Information Service, see Fulwider, *German Propaganda*, pp. 57–75.

76 Crystal Eastman played major role in two significant peace groups during war: The American Union Against Militarism and the Women's Peace Party. See Kazin, *War against War*, p. 79.

77 *The Masses* was particularly well-known for its cartoons, and many of its cartoonists, including Boardman Robinson, forged successful careers. See O'Neil, *Echoes of Revolt*, p. 18.



Image 5. Boardman Robinson, *The Masses*, September 1916, p. 13.

By 1916, many satirical magazines were heavily embroiled in debates over military preparedness. Editors and cartoonists employed humour to deride their opponents, buttress their arguments, and persuade their readers. But while the *Masses* continued to resist the logic of preparedness, the major national humour magazines – which were more likely to reflect broader currents of popular opinion – had all begun to support greater military investment. At the same time, this belief in the value of preparedness was also accompanied by a growing antipathy towards Germany.

III. Mocking Germany

As neutrality became questionable, and as preparedness became desirable, Germans became an increasing target of ridicule. Numerous philosophers, including Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer, have argued that incongruity is integral to humour.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Morreall, ed., *The Philosophy of Laughter*, p. 6.



Image 6. K. R. Chamberlain, *The Masses*, September 1916, p. 9.

Life's resident humourist, Thomas Lansing Masson, certainly believed so, arguing that 'you must have principles to be a humourist. Then from the standpoint of your principle, you are struck by the absurdity, by the incongruity, by the positive injustice of a certain thing'.⁷⁹ German atrocities fell into this category. *Life* highlighted the disconnect between German propaganda pronouncements – which placed an emphasis on the sophistication of *Kultur* – and the questionable actions of the German army, particularly during the invasion of Belgium. In January 1915, for example, the magazine imagined a conversation between an arrogant German professor and a young American, in which the American asks why Germany has not done anything to provide food or compensation to the Belgians:

'We are much too cultured to do that', replied the German. 'To-day we expect rich America to attend to Belgium's needs, and later it is quite possible that we may cross the ocean to inform you in our forcible manner that it is wicked to criticize the foremost and most cultured nation in the world for anything that it may wish to do'.⁸⁰

A *Puck* cartoon made a similar point in April 1915. Here, two German intellectuals are depicted discussing the 'The Uses of Kultur' (Image 7):

⁷⁹ Quoted in Flautz, *Life*, p. 64.

⁸⁰ 'The German Professor Speaks', *Life*, 21 January 1915, p. 102.

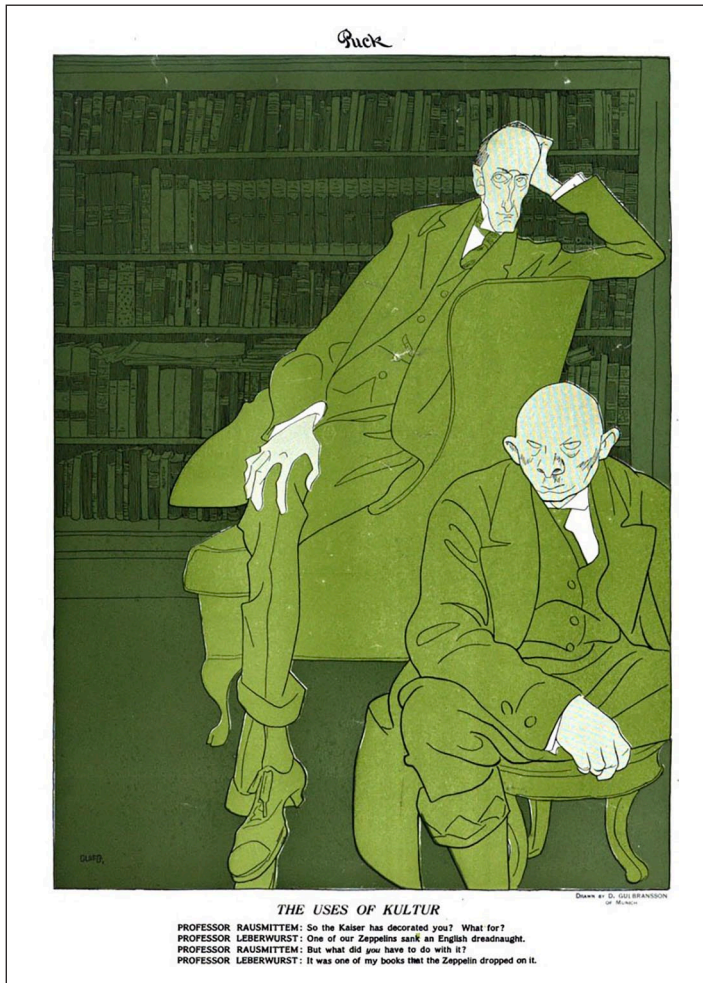


Image 7. D. Gulbransson, 'The Uses of Kultur', *Puck*, 24 April 1915, p. 11.

Professor Rausmittem: So the Kaiser has decorated you? What for?

Professor Leberwurst: One of our Zeppelins sank an English dreadnaught.

Professor Rausmittem: But what did *you* have to do with it?

Professor Leberwurst: It was one of my books that the Zeppelin dropped on it.

There is a strain of anti-intellectualism here (the professor's book is evidently a turgid tome), but again *Kultur* is the main butt of the joke: German claims to be an advanced, cultured nation could easily be contrasted with examples of its apparent brutality.

Puck, despite its German roots, began increasingly to mock Germany throughout 1916. In September of that year, the magazine ran an ironic 'pro-German number', which

contained biting satire of Germany. An article entitled the 'Hymn of Love', for example, provided a tongue-in-cheek response to Ernst Lissauer's jingoistic, Anglophobic poem, 'The Hymn of Hate Against England', which had been published widely in newspapers across Germany in 1914. The first few lines of the 'Hymn of Love' (which was actually a prose piece) stated,

I love the Germans. I rise to their defense because everybody came and jumped all over them when they weren't ready to fight and craved nothing but peace. Who wouldn't ride with the underdog? I chant the praise of the Germans because the Belgians were nasty to them and acted uppish when the Germans wanted to walk across their lawns and burn down their homes without permission.⁸¹

The piece continues in this vein and appeared above a cartoon warning against the potential consequences of the United States failing to confront German aggression. Drawn by the well-established cartoonist Otho Cushing – who also regularly contributed to *Life* – the cartoon depicted a scene at the Plaza Hotel, New York, in which men and women, dressed in stereotypically German garb, are relaxing at a café while a woman sells German newspapers. Cushing implies that there is a coarseness and lack of refinement to German culture, as men in lederhosen drink from tankards of beer, and one toasts his female companion. The militarization of society is also apparent: men in uniform mingle with civilians (Image 8). The German caricatures, and their incongruous placement within a Manhattan landmark associated with Anglo-Saxon high society, lend the image a distinctly comic air. But there was also a serious message behind this cartoon: a completely neutral stance, and a failure to confront German aggression, might compromise the nation's security and even its way of life. The humour in this cartoon, therefore, performs two functions. Cushing clearly employs it to ridicule, 'othering' German culture and thus distinguishing it from dominant, Anglo-Saxon conceptions of American identity. But by addressing genuine fears regarding German militarism, the cartoon also acts as a 'safety valve', allowing these concerns to be confronted in a palatable and amusing form.

These sentiments reflected a broader nativist antipathy towards 'hyphenated Americans', a disparaging term used to describe those who claimed a dual national heritage. 'Anti-hyphenism' intensified after the sinking of the *Lusitania* and led to calls among nativists for '100 per cent Americanism'. Many advocates of preparedness shared these views and believed that immigrants who did not pledge complete loyalty to the United States were a potential threat to the nation's security during a time of crisis.⁸² Theodore Roosevelt was a major proponent of '100 per cent Americanism', but so too was Woodrow Wilson, who also questioned the loyalties of foreign-born American citizens.⁸³ American identity soon became firmly entwined with Anglo-Saxon identity: communities which lay outside these ethnic confines were increasingly ostracized. In its 'Pro-German' number,

81 'Hymn of Love', *Puck*, 23 September 1916, p. 10.

82 Neiberg, *The Path to War*, p. 144.

83 Sarah Churchwell, *Behold America: A History of America First and the American Dream* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 48.

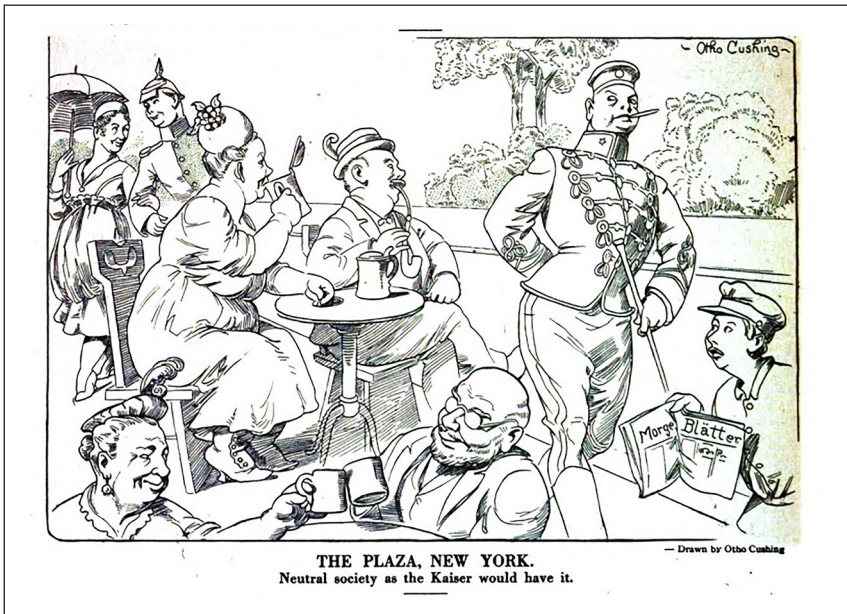


Image 8. Otto Cushing, *Puck*, 23 September 1916, p. 10.

Puck's editorial also stressed that, while it did not actually oppose Germany itself, it was nonetheless 'anti-hyphenate'.⁸⁴ Needless to say, Anglo-Saxon Americans were not required to prove their loyalty. *Puck's* German origins and pacifist inclinations upon the outbreak of war make its embrace of preparedness and 'anti-hyphenism' all the more striking. Without a growing popular appetite for these sentiments, it is hard to imagine the magazine adjusting its position so radically.

Humour's capacity to ostracize made it a useful tool for those who preached '100 per cent Americanism', and cartoonists, in particular, performed an important role within this xenophobic political climate. Political cartoons rely on recognizable motifs and cultural iconography, which allow illustrators to make concise allusions to national stereotypes.⁸⁵ Nations need to be reduced to stock symbols or personified, be it through human or anthropomorphic characters. This immediacy often makes cartoons especially potent vehicles for satire. The Kaiser, with his wispy moustache and pointy *pickelhaube*, was easily caricatured, but in 1915 and 1916, cartoonists frequently turned to a new and perhaps less threatening symbol: the dachshund. The dog breed had originated in Germany and was strongly associated with Kaiserism. Wilhelm II himself was a well-known dachshund-lover. Cartoonists often drew dachshunds when questioning the loyalties of German-Americans or when addressing the threat of a German invasion.

A *Life* cartoon on 28 October 1915, for example, alluded to the myth of the Trojan Horse. Drawn by William H. Walker, it depicted a giant dachshund on wheels outside the

⁸⁴ *Puck*, 23 September 1916, p. 9.

⁸⁵ Chapman et al., *Comics and the World Wars*, p. 40.

Capitol Building in Washington, DC. German soldiers escape en masse from the dachshund's cylindrical body, while Uncle Sam is slumped asleep on a bench in the corner of the cartoon, unaware of the invasion. One of the German soldiers carries a flag emblazoned with the words 'German-American propaganda' (Image 9). This was a far-fetched scenario, but therein lies the humour. Despite a rather sly look on its face, the giant sausage dog, with its elongated proportions, is hardly threatening, and lends the image an absurd quality. And yet, as with many of *Life's* cartoons, there is a serious message behind the image, which stresses that German-Americans are not to be trusted, particularly when a war between the United States and Germany was a distinct possibility. The coexistence of these two messages – the comic and the serious – lends the cartoon an ambiguity. On the one hand, *Life* appears to be playing on, perhaps even mocking, the nativism of its readers. However, given *Life's* increasing calls for preparedness, in addition to the magazine's vilification of Germany, it appears that the publication did view German immigrants and German militarism as a threat to American security. In this sense, like many other cartoons which addressed the perceived threat of German invasion, the humour in this image also acted as 'safety valve', allowing readers both to confront and contain their fears.

These fears were not solely a consequence of the *Lusitania* incident: a number of sabotage attempts throughout 1915, many of which the authorities attributed to Germans, also inflamed nativist attitudes. A series of industrial explosions and incidents of ships catching fire, for instance, fermented fears that the German government was attempting to disrupt the flow of American exports to Britain. These suspicions were confirmed when federal agents found bomb-making equipment in the garage of Robert Fay, a German chemist living in New Jersey. Fears that Germans within the United States were plotting to compromise American security were not entirely unfounded, therefore, even if concerns regarding a full-blown invasion were fantastical.⁸⁶

This fear of invasion infused American culture throughout 1915 and 1916. J. Bernard Walker's novel *America Fallen!* (1915) imagined a German invasion which resulted in the seizure of Boston, New York, and Washington, DC. Hudson Maxim's book *Defenseless America* (1915), advocated preparedness and argued that the United States would be attacked by whichever side eventually won the war in Europe. A screen adaptation, entitled *The Battle Cry of Peace*, released in September 1915, was perhaps the biggest influence on *Life's* invasion-themed cartoon. In this pro-preparedness film, scenes depicted Germans in spiked helmets ransacking Times Square and burning down the Capitol Building.⁸⁷ Although *Life's* cartoonists saw the humorous side of these invasion fears, the magazine nevertheless espoused preparedness in a similar vein. Unsurprisingly, the *Masses* – which continued to adhere to its radical agenda – was more dismissive. A cartoon from July 1915 depicted a scene at a café, in which a patron reading a newspaper notes that there 'ain't going to be no swimming at Coney this summer'. When his companion asks why, the man replies, 'they say the Germans have poisoned the ocean' (Image 10). Fears of German subterfuge were also easily parodied, therefore, especially within a magazine ideologically committed to internationalist principles.

86 Neiberg, *Path to War*, pp. 79–81.

87 Doenecke, *Nothing Less than War*, pp. 106–7.

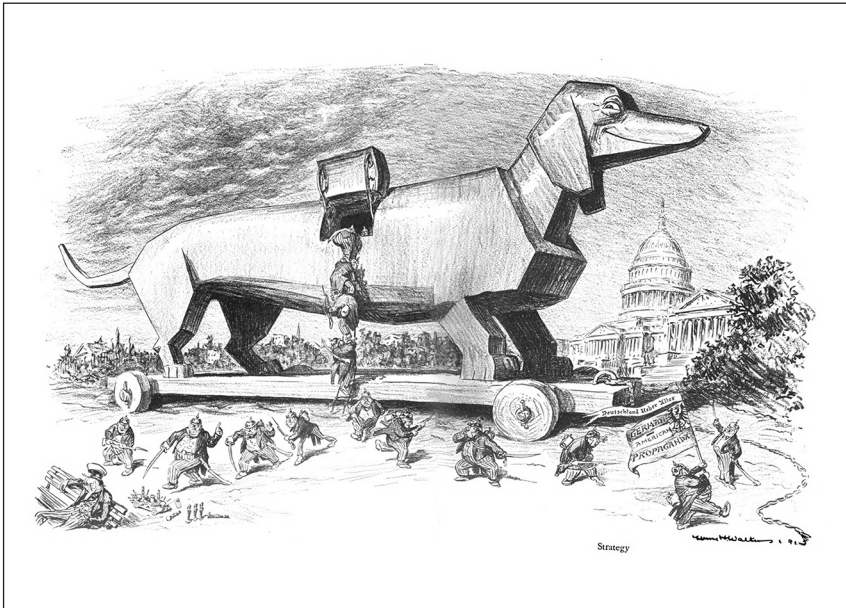


Image 9. William H. Walker, *Life*, 28 October 1915, pp. 805–806.



Image 10. John Barber, *The Masses*, July 1915, p. 17.

These fears came to a head in the months preceding the 1916 presidential election, when the incumbent Democrat Woodrow Wilson stood against the Republican challenger Charles Evans Hughes. Wilson and Hughes agreed that the United States should remain neutral. In May 1916, following the German sinking of the *Sussex*, a British passenger liner, Wilson had convinced the German government to issue a pledge in which it promised not to sink civilian shipping. With the threat of war diminished, at least for the time being, both challengers chose not to make the conflict central to their campaigns. Wilson's campaign nevertheless highlighted the President's diplomatic success with the slogan 'He Kept Us Out of War'.⁸⁸ The President also continued to target 'hyphenated Americans', stressing that 'we ought to let it be known that nobody who does not put America first can consort with us'.⁸⁹

Hughes and the Republicans, meanwhile, found it difficult to settle upon an election-winning strategy. By taking a moderate stance on the war, Hughes hoped to win over staunch advocates of neutrality. He also sought to secure votes among German-Americans and Irish-Americans, some of whom had been angered by Wilson's uncompromising rhetoric regarding 'hyphenated Americans'. Hughes certainly did not want to alienate German-Americans, many of whom traditionally voted Republican and resided in crucial swing states such as Wisconsin and Ohio.⁹⁰ By failing to denounce Germany, however, Hughes invited criticism from bellicose voices within his own party, including that of Theodore Roosevelt. Hughes was also targeted by the pro-Wilson press, including *Life*, whose editors had decided to back the president's campaign for re-election, despite their previous criticisms of his administration. In doing so, the magazine condemned Hughes for his failure to promote preparedness, accusing him of pro-German sympathies. On 19 October 1916, for example, *Life* contained a cartoon drawn by Edwin Marcus, which depicted Hughes astride a galloping dachshund, symbolizing the German-American vote (Image 11). This motif reached its apotheosis in the 26 October issue of *Life*, in which another Marcus cartoon portrayed Hughes gradually metamorphosing into a dachshund (Image 12). Political cartoons like these were both humorous and persuasive. By juxtaposing a caricatured Hughes alongside a recognizable symbol of Germany, Marcus directly questioned Hughes's loyalties, and did so far more succinctly than would be possible in a conventional editorial. This was an especially potent message amid growing clamours for '100 per cent Americanism'.

Puck adopted a comparable stance and used similar satirical methods. On 23 September 1916, the magazine contained a cartoon which equated a potential Hughes presidency with a capitulation to Germany (Image 13). Replete with stereotypical imagery – including a *pickelhaube* and a dachshund – the cartoon, drawn by W. J. Enright, played on nativist fears regarding the supposedly pernicious influence of German-Americans. But the image also conveyed an important political message designed to undermine Hughes's bid for the White House. *Puck's* editors evidently believed that German-Americans needed to be confronted with an uncompromising stance; Hughes's failure to do so invited criticism. Nevertheless, while *Puck* portrayed

88 Neiberg, *The Path to War*, p. 172.

89 Quoted in Churchwell, *Behold America*, p. 48.

90 Neiberg, *The Path to War*, pp. 172–3.



Image 11. Edwin Marcus, *Life*, 19 October 1916, p. 664. Marcus was also an editorial cartoonist for the *New York Times*.

Germany as a potential threat, its editorial in the same issue stressed that while the magazine opposed the Hohenzollern dynasty, it was not necessarily against German culture per se.⁹¹ In November 1916, moreover, the magazine also announced that it still favoured neutrality rather than intervention.⁹² This ambivalence persisted until early 1917, as *Puck*'s editors sought to satisfy the clamour for pro-preparedness, anti-hyphenate sentiment without resorting to the extremes of Germanophobia or interventionism.

The demonization of German-Americans, as Zachary Smith has demonstrated, was a relatively rapid process. German immigrants had usually been viewed positively before the outbreak of the war, but by 1917 they had been transformed 'into a full-fledged Other in the minds of many white Americans'.⁹³ *Puck*, alongside *Life*, had played a significant

91 *Puck*, 23 September 1916, p. 9.

92 'A Vote for Hughes is a Vote for War', *Puck*, 4 November 1916, p. 11.

93 Smith, *Age of Fear*, p. 45.

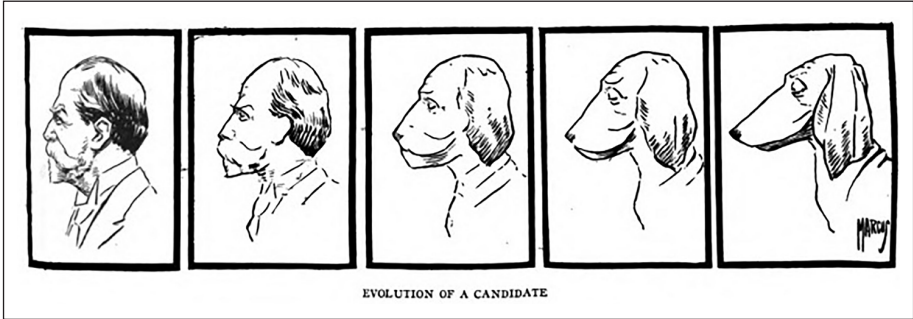


Image 12. Edwin Marcus, *Life*, 26 October 1916, p. 703.

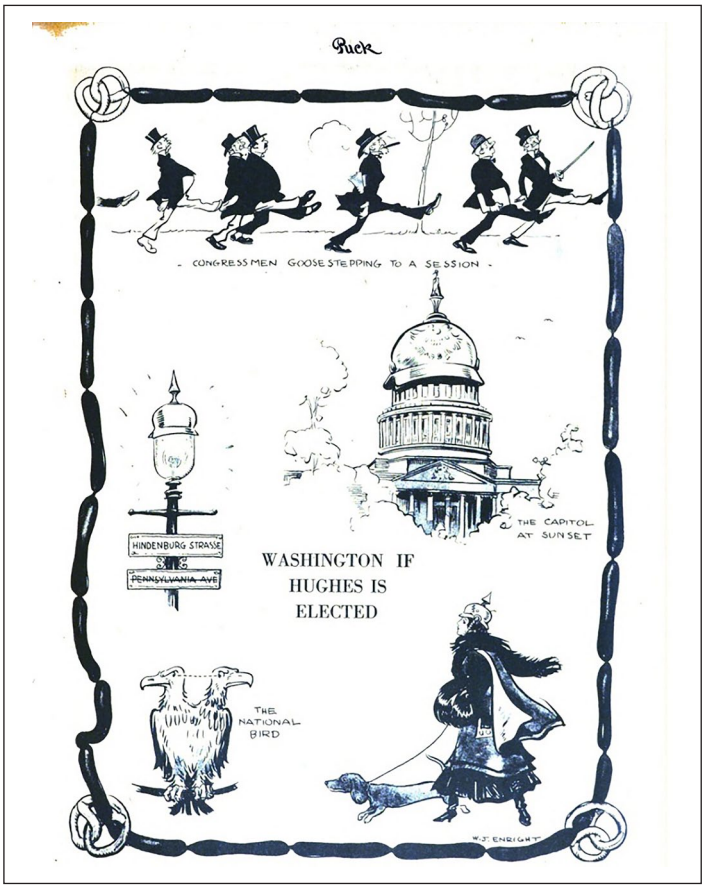


Image 13. W. J. Enright, *Puck*, 28 October 1916, p. 15.

role in their othering. Humour and satire were ideal tools with which to ostracize and ridicule, central components of the crusade against 'hyphenated Americans' during the months preceding the 1916 presidential election.

IV. The declaration of war

Wilson did of course win the election. Not long after, the United States was at war. The resumption of German submarine warfare on 1 February, followed by the news of the Zimmermann Telegram on 1 March, was enough to convince many Americans that war was necessary.⁹⁴ Throughout the early months of 1917, many satirical magazines openly pushed for intervention. *Life* was especially vocal on this matter, denouncing Germany and urging Wilson to act in a series of editorials and cartoons. On 8 March, for instance, with war looking increasingly likely, the magazine contained a cartoon by Harry Grant Dart. Here, Woodrow Wilson is depicted as a small but plucky American soldier, stepping in to assist the Roman goddess Roma (the personification of 'civilization') finish off a bloodied, war-weary Kaiser (Image 14). Although Dart supported Wilson's decision to act, he nonetheless belittled him in the process: his exasperation that the President had taken so long to contemplate war is readily apparent, the implication being that the United States should have intervened in response to the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915.

Following the declaration of war on 6 April, other satirical magazines adopted a more strident perspective. On 28 April, *Puck's* editorial denounced 'hyphenated Americans', although it did persist with a more nuanced position insofar as it stressed that the Kaiser, not the German people, was the real enemy.⁹⁵ A cartoon from this issue, depicting Uncle Sam in a combative posture, reinforced this message (Image 15). With its Germanic roots, *Puck* was perhaps still wary of alienating German-American readers. Such nuance was largely absent from *Life's* pages by this stage.

Curiously, *Judge's* satirists hardly discussed the war, even during April 1917, perhaps realizing that Americans could read about it elsewhere and were tired of doing so.⁹⁶ *Jim Jam Jems* also avoided the war in early 1917, likely due to the ambivalence of its editor Sam H. Clark. Clark's sympathy for Germany may still have found a receptive audience in North Dakota: one of the state's senators, Asle Gronna, for instance, was one of only six senators to vote against intervention in April 1917. In defence of his position, Gronna

94 Neiberg, *The Path to War*, p. 221; Smith, *Age of Fear*, p. 12; Fulwider, *German Propaganda*, pp. 92–3. The Zimmermann Telegram – in which the German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, had proposed an alliance between Germany and Mexico – accelerated Wilson's decision for war, but it does not appear to have had a decisive impact on public opinion. Most pro-intervention newspapers, for example, had taken a firm stance prior to reporting on the telegram. See Thomas Boghardt, *The Zimmermann Telegram: Intelligence, Diplomacy, and America's Entry into World War I* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012), pp. 180, 190.

95 'The Making of an American', *Puck*, 28 April 1917, p. 7.

96 In spite, or perhaps because, of its avoidance of the war, *Judge* enjoyed a healthy circulation throughout the conflict. Its circulation had risen steadily from around 110,000 in 1914 to nearly 132,000 by the end of 1917. See N. W. Ayer and Son's *American Newspaper Annual and Directory* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer and Son, 1918), p. 1217.



Image 14. Harry Grant Dart, *Life*, 8 March 1917, p. 387.

had presented the Senate with numerous letters in opposition to the war from his constituents.⁹⁷ Clark, however, was beginning to reassess his views on the conflict. When he did address the war again in May 1917, he performed a remarkable volte-face, announcing that ‘Uncle Sam has set his machinery in motion and is priming his guns to give the Kaiser and his autocratic following a lesson in international courtesy that will not soon be forgotten’.⁹⁸ The popular mood had shifted considerably since the start of the war, and Clark’s personal views, in the light of recent events, had evidently evolved too. With war declared, moreover, supporting Germany would have appeared deeply unpatriotic.

In spite of this, the *Masses* continued to oppose the war, even after the American decision to intervene. In contrast to the other magazines discussed, pacifism was central to the ideological identity of the *Masses*, and it seems unlikely that either the publication’s readers or its contributors would have abandoned their opposition to the war. In June 1917, its

⁹⁷ *Congressional Record*, Volume LV, 4 April 1917, pp. 254–6.

⁹⁸ Sam H. Clark, ‘Monthly Preamble’, *Jim Jam Jems*, May 1917, p. 7.



Image 15. William Charles Morris, *Puck*, 28 April 1917, p. 6.

editor Max Eastman stressed that the conflict 'is not a war for democracy', arguing instead that it had been 'engendered fundamentally by commercial self-interest and the organic passions of nationalism'.⁹⁹ A Boardman Robinson cartoon accompanying the editorial also refuted the notion that the war was a crusade on behalf of democratic values by drawing attention to the introduction of conscription and increased wartime censorship (Image 16). Due to its continued opposition to the war, the *Masses* would eventually fall victim to these increased restrictions on civil liberties: in November 1917, its editors were indicted under the Espionage Act and the magazine was forced to close down.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Max Eastman, 'Advertising Democracy', *The Masses*, June 1917, pp. 5–8.

¹⁰⁰ Frederick G. Giffin, *Six Who Protested: Radical Opposition to the First World War* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1977), p. 8.



Image 16. Boardman Robinson, *The Masses*, June 1917, p. 7.

V. Conclusion

Satirical magazines, though often overlooked by historians, provide valuable insights into the process which led the United States from neutrality to intervention in the First World War. First, these publications demonstrate that humour was a significant propagandistic tool between 1914 and 1917. It allowed writers and cartoonists to attack potential enemies, both internal and external. Humour helped to expose the potential threat posed by Germany and thus became a key instrument with which pro-preparedness voices pressed for intervention. It allowed readers' fears to be confronted, but also contained, in an unthreatening and amusing form. Humour's capacity to ostracize, moreover, made satirical magazines an integral component of the increased nativism which gripped the United States after 1915. In doing so, it became a means through which American identity was delimited. This had far-reaching implications. Although Germanophobia diminished after 1918, wartime nativism persisted and was reflected in the passing of

Johnson-Reed National Origins Act of 1924, which severely restricted immigration to the United States.¹⁰¹

Satirical magazines also reflect the range of views on the war that initially existed in the United States. In smaller magazines, humour allowed some editors and cartoonists to resist the pro-allied and increasingly interventionist sentiments that prevailed in the popular press. Nevertheless, with the exception of the *Masses*, most satirical magazines came to support the case for American intervention. *Life* was an early proponent of preparedness, but even *Puck*, which had expressed pacifist views upon the war's outbreak, soon adopted an anti-hyphen, pro-preparedness agenda.

In this sense, satirical magazines challenge prevailing assumptions regarding public attitudes during the neutrality period. Jackson Lears, for instance, has suggested that the decision for intervention was an example of 'cultural hegemony' at work, in which congressmen voted against the interests of their constituents, overlooking or silencing popular anti-war sentiment.¹⁰² Michael Kazin's study of the American peace movement between 1914 and 1918 has also advanced this interpretation.¹⁰³ It is not evident, however, that congressmen *did* vote against the sentiments of their constituents. When Congress debated intervention, pro-war senators provided ample evidence of their constituents' views to justify their positions.¹⁰⁴ And nor should we assume that the press, including satirical magazines, sought *only* to silence or manipulate the views of its readers. Magazines were commercial enterprises which aimed to appeal to their readers' tastes and opinions. Many had large circulations and attracted a wide readership. In this sense, even without direct evidence of their reception, it seems likely that these publications often reflected their readers' views on the war. Humour, in particular, depended on this synergy between the publication and its readership. By April 1917, therefore, many Americans may well have sympathized with the nativist, interventionist stance that proliferated in the larger satirical periodicals. These influential voices in American print culture normalized Germanophobic, pro-allied sentiment and primed the American public for action. And so, when Wilson did finally declare war on Germany, there were few voices of dissent.

Examining satirical periodicals between 1914 and 1917 is also important to our understanding of propaganda and public opinion *after* American intervention. Restrictions on free speech in 1917 may have reduced the diversity of humorous responses to the war, but many of the key characteristics of wartime propaganda – most notably the demonization of Germany – drew on themes that the satirical press had developed before 1917. Indeed, the satirical press only intensified its vilification of the Germans. The key elements of wartime humour and propaganda, therefore, were not without their antecedents. Rather, they drew on and developed tropes which had emerged while the United States was still a neutral power – a further reminder that histories of the United States in the Great War must begin in 1914.

101 Smith, *Age of Fear*, p. 172.

102 T. J. Jackson Lears, 'The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities', *The American Historical Review* 90:3 (1985), p. 586.

103 Kazin, *War Against War*, p. 184.

104 For example, see the *Congressional Record*, Volume LV, 4 April 1917, pp. 256–60.

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ORCID iD

Vincent Trott  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7413-304X>

Author biography

Vincent Trott is lecturer in History at the Open University. His research focuses on British and American history, with a particular focus on the First World War, publishing and print culture, cultural memory, propaganda, and the history of humour. His first book, *Publishers, Readers and the Great War*, was published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2017.